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H – 3712

International Court of Justice

H3712 – 0002

INTERNATIONAL MILITARY TRIBUNAL.

I, DAVID PATRICK MAXWELL FYFE, hereby certify that the document annexed hereto and numbered D.644 is an official British Governmental document,

DPMF

~~a report of the United Nations;~~

~~an act or document of a committee set up for the investigation of war crimes;~~

~~a record or finding of a Tribunal of the United Nations;~~

within the meaning of Article 21 of the Charter of the International Military Tribunal.

and a document made by a person in the employment of the British Government in the ordinary course of his duties, and that such person was in a position and under a duty to make all reasonable investigations relating to the subject matter thereof.

(signed) D. P. Maxwell Fyfe

(date) 10th January 1946

(strike out and initial all words not applicable).

946

B 039121

D 644

NID 24/T 18/45

TOP SECRET

THE SINKING OF S.S. "SHEAF MEAD"

INTERNATIONAL MILITARY TRIBUNAL
NURNBERG, GERMANY
GB Exhibit 192
Filed Jan 14, 1946

N.I.D. 24

2.7.45

B 039122

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N.I.D. 24/T 18/45 TOP SECRET

THE SINKING OF S.S. "SHARE MEAD"

The British s/s. "SHARE MEAD" was torpedoed without warning on 27.5.40, with the loss of 31 of the crew. The commander of the U-boat responsible is reported to have behaved in an exceptionally callous manner towards the men clinging to upturned boats and pieces of wood. It was thought that this man was Kapitaenleutnant Ochrn of U37: the following extract from his diary for 27.5.40. leaves no doubt on the matter and speaks for itself as to his behaviour.

Kapitaenleutnant Ochrn was a prisoner of war, but has now been repatriated.

"27 May

1252 Steamship sighted, steering west. She must therefore be proceeding from Vigo or La Coruna. Probably up to 5,000 tons. Speed approx. 10 knots. Start tracking. Enemy is steering a zig-zag course of only about 10 degrees and so slightly that, at first, the changes of course are taken for yawing. Only after a while is the cause realised, and then it is doubtful whether, with the changing visibility and great distance, the position had not been miscalculated..

1243 W/T message from B.d.U. (F.O. U-Boats)

"Enemy auxiliary cruisers are operating between 41°-42° 30' and 10° 30' - 11° West, against a German steamship sailing from Vigo."

1444 Boat now in position ahead of steamship. Dived. Nothing as yet to be seen in periscope. Swell considerably hinders depth-keeping and observation. She cannot be very far away by now - and still n nothing. Hydrophone is operated - nothing. Then she comes in sight 4-5,000 metres away. In this case, a steamship capable of 9-10 knots; was therefore sighted in the periscope before she was heard. This, in spite of otherwise excellent installations. So one cannot always rely on hydrophones.
At full speed, keep abreast of her. But what is a steamship doing here on a course of 280°? Can she be German? It seems that some are to put out from Vigo.
She would arrive here just at this time, putting out last night. From appearances, about 3,000-5,000 G.R.T. The officer of watch III is an authority on merchant ships and suggests she may be a Levantine steamer. Only a short time is to elapse, now, before we fire.
I must on no account make a mistake, and feel I have been rather driven into a corner over this matter.

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The distance apart is narrowing. The steamship draws in quickly, but the position is still 40-50. I cannot see the stern yet. Tube ready.. shall I or not ? The gunnery crews are also prepared. On the ship's side a yellow cross on a small, square, dark blue ground. Swedish? Presumably not. I raise the periscope a little. Hurrah, a gun at the stern, an A/A gun or something similar. Fire! It cannot miss. Periscope up, observation. Aft of the funnel, a boxlike erection of sail and wood- on lathes. Hit scored aft 30. Distance was 320 metres. Stern sinks considerably. The crew jump into the boats. The bows rise up. I have a look round.

1554 Surface. Stern is underwater. Bows rise higher. The boats are now on the water. Lucky for them. A picture of complete order. They lie at some distance. The bows rear up quite high. Two men appear from somewhere in the forward part of the ship. They leap and rush with great bounds along the deck down to the stern. The stern disappears. A boat capsizes. Then a boiler explosion. Two men fly through the air, limbs outstretched. Bursting and crashing. Then all is over. A large heap of wreckage floats up. We approach it to identify the name. The crew have saved themselves on wreckage and capsized boats. We fish out a buoy. No name on it. I ask a man on the raft. He says,
1648 hardly turning his head- Nix Name. A young boy in the water calls "help, help, please". The others are very composed. They look damp and somewhat tired. An expression of cold hatred is on their faces. Onto the old course. After washing the paint off the buoy, the name comes to light:-
Greatefield, Glasgow. 5006 G.R.T. [M]
It is not clear whether she was sailing as a normal merchant ship. The following seem to point to the contrary:-

1. The course. She must have put out from a Spanish port, and steered a course off the normal traffic route.
2. The blue square with the yellow cross on the ship's side. It may have some tactical significance.
3. The circumstance that she was painted grey and carried no name.
4. The order and discipline amongst the crew during, and after, the sinking of the ship. Also, the crew were not in uniform.
5. The remarkable box/like erection behind the funnel, behind which another gun may have been hidden."

([M] The name of the ship was "Gretaston" before it was changed in January 1940.)

B 039124

N.I.D. 24
2.7.45

I, D.P.W. Williamson, Lieutenant, R.N.V.R., possessing a thorough knowledge of the English and German languages, hereby certify that the above is an official Admiralty report and a true and correct translation of a German document held by the British Admiralty.

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SHEAF MEAD 5,008 G.r.t. Voyage Swansea to Philadelphia.

Torpedoed and sunk by U-boat at 1250 27th May, 1940.

Number of lives lost 31. Some presumed by drowning, others by exposure.

Extract from Chief Engineers Reports. Begins -

When I came to the surface I found myself on the port side, that is, nearest to the submarine, which was only about 5 yards away. The submarine Captain asked the steward the name of the ship, which he told him, and the enemy picked up one of our lifebuoys, but this had the name "GRETASTON" on it, as this was the name of our ship before it was changed to "SHEAF MEAD" last January.

The Captain was a young fellow of about 28, height 5'10", about 13 stone and well built. He had fair hair, was rather good-looking with sharp features, and was clean-shaven. He spoke good English with a very deep voice. He was the only man in uniform, I think he had two gold stripes, and he wore a cape with a badge but no braid. There were about 10 men on the deck of the submarine, all of whom appeared to be freshly shaved; they were very young, only boys really, and they wore blue and brown dungarees, or a kind of smock like that worn by fishermen. No one was in khaki, nor wearing forage caps. I did not hear them speaking German amongst themselves, and there was no sound of any wireless.

The submarine must have surfaced very quickly, as it was in full view when I came up from my room. There was no warning noise of any kind before we were torpedoed and no one appears to have sighted her; the gunner who had been on the gun platform until 1230 had gone below for his lunch, and was about to return to his station at 1250. He was never seen again.

She was painted a greenish-grey colour with no markings of any description, and she looked absolutely brand new. She was rather long, about 150-200 feet with one gun well forward from the bridge. This gun was covered and not manned. There were two rows of slots along the side; we could see a man walking round under the deck on a level with the upper row of slots. She had cut-away bows but I did not notice a net cutter. Two men stood at the side with boat hooks, to keep us off.

They cruised around for half an hour, taking photographs of us in the water, otherwise they just watched us, but said nothing. Then she submerged and went off, without offering us any assistance whatever. Ends.

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G. B. EXHIBIT

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